



*Plan of Action
2004-2005*

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

PO Box 745

Halifax NS B3J 2T3

902.424.8662

1.800.565.8662

www.gov.ns.ca/staw

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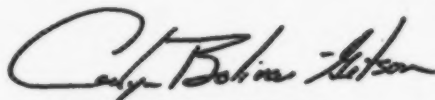
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Message from Minister

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women's business plan continues to build on accomplishments of the past years, to provide research and policy advice to shape public policy that is responsive to the needs of women in Nova Scotia.

The goals of social inclusion, economic equality, personal safety and freedom from violence, and improved health for women and their families reflect what the Council continues to hear from women in all parts of the Province. I look forward to Council's advice and contributions in the coming year.



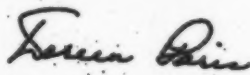
Carolyn Bolivar-Getson

Minister responsible for the administration of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act

Message from Chair

As my term as Chair of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women approaches its mid-point, I am pleased to present the business plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

The Council members and staff are dedicated to the mission of advancing equality, fairness and dignity for all women. In our opinion, this business plan will further that mission in the coming year, and shape government policies and programs that touch the lives of women throughout Nova Scotia.



Doreen Paris
Chair

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

1.0 Mandate and Mission

The mandate of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women derives from the statute establishing the Council. Section 4(1) requires the Council to advise the Minister and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia. Section 4(2) defines the powers of the Council, which may:

- receive and hear petitions and suggestions concerning the status of women
- undertake and recommend research on matters relevant to the status of women
- recommend and participate in programs concerning the status of women
- propose legislation, policies and practices to promote equality of opportunity and status
- publish reports, studies and recommendations

Mission

- To advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women in Nova Scotia

1.1 Planning Context

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women identifies issues of concern to women through research on the one hand, and community liaison and outreach on the other. The agency informs and educates a variety of target audiences about the issues, and develops policy and program advice based on community input and evidence based on both qualitative and quantitative research.

Some major contextual factors underlying the opportunities and challenges faced by the agency are the source of the strategic goals, more fully discussed below, governing the work of the Advisory Council.

The first strategic goal of the agency refers to the **social inclusion of women and their participation in the decision-making** that affects their lives, with particular attention to women from disadvantaged groups. All women remain under-represented in the political arena at every level of government, and the agency continues to address this challenge. In addition, our work is grounded in the fact that women from Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, and immigrant communities face exclusion and discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity as well as gender. Furthermore, women remain at risk of poverty for a wide variety of reasons. As a result of poverty, single mothers face social exclusion for both themselves and their children, with highly negative long-term consequences. Women with disabilities continue to have great difficulty in earning a living.

Secondly, **achievement of economic equality** remains an elusive goal. Despite revolutionary gains in educational achievement, too many women in Nova Scotia have not yet benefitted from education and

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training that is increasingly essential to self-sufficiency for themselves and their families. Women remain over-represented in low wage occupations and precarious employment. They are seriously under-represented in high-paying occupations and have made virtually no inroads in areas such as the apprenticeable trades.

Even when women achieve the same or higher levels of education than men, the earnings gap between men and women stubbornly persists. An important reason for the persistent gap is that women remain the primary caregivers for children, and with the demographic shift to an aged population, are increasingly time-stressed in balancing paid work and unpaid caregiving for the elderly. The labour force participation patterns of many women are characterized by periodic interruption and, in many instances, early departure from the paid labour force to take on full-time caregiving work either for grandchildren or for aged parents and other relatives. In consequence, "unattached women", whether lone mothers or widows, are at significant risk of very low income.

Personal safety and freedom from violence are of continuing concern. While there was a reduction in the prevalence of self-reported abuse between 1993 and 1998, more recent reports of increasing family violence calls to police in industrial Cape Breton are alarming, as is continuing under-capacity in Halifax Regional Municipality's only transition house. In the area of sexual assault, the use of conditional sentencing is widely considered to be inappropriate not only by women, but by men as well. Challenges remain in defining a more appropriate balance between the rights of victims and of offenders.

The improvement of the **health of women** remains a priority for the Advisory Council. Through partnerships with agencies such as the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia and with individual researchers, we are able to add value to the province's efforts in health promotion, to generate new knowledge through our Healthy Balance Research Program, and to find ways to translate that knowledge into the policy arena.

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women is called upon to participate in the cross-sectoral initiatives that increasingly characterize the policy and program development process. Through policy advice to initiatives such as the Skills Agenda and the Sustainable Communities Initiative, through our experience and expertise in social inclusion processes, the complex issues women confront are addressed. The formation and maintenance of collaborative relationships remain a key success factor for further progress toward women's equality, and an important challenge for the agency is to respond with timely and useful information and advice on the numerous requests from within government and from the wider community.

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2.0 Strategic Goals

The members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women have defined the following strategic goals for the work of the agency:

Inclusion and Participation

- To increase the participation of women in all their diversity in decisions that affect their lives, families, and communities, with particular emphasis on those who face discrimination because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

The goal of inclusion addresses government priorities in areas of cultural diversity and the social inclusion of all Nova Scotians. In accord with the priority established by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Forum of Status of Women Ministers, the agency will focus on the inclusion of aboriginal women during the coming year. The Office of Aboriginal Affairs is a key partner in this work.

Economic Equality

- To promote women's economic equality

Women's participation in the full range of education, training and occupational opportunities is an integral part of building a learning culture, greater prosperity, and supporting families and Nova Scotians in need within a context of fiscal responsibility and accountability.

An important initiative in the coming year will be to disseminate our research on transition to employment programs for low income women to both policy and community audiences, with a view to advising on optimum policy and program initiatives to achieve stable, well-paid employment for women currently outside or marginal within the labour market.

Personal Safety and Freedom from Violence

- To reduce violence against women in communities, workplaces and families

Safer communities and streets are a priority of government. The Council's information and education activities related to violence against women support this priority through primary prevention and assisting women affected by violence in getting the help they need. In response to community concern, the Council will develop information products to increase awareness of the exploitation of women and girls through technology and the Internet.

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Health and Well-Being

- To improve the health and well-being of women and their families

Council continues to partner with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health in the Canadian Institutes for Health Research-funded Healthy Balance Research Program. The research will demonstrate the connections between women's paid work and unpaid caregiving on the one hand, and their health status on the other. Furthermore, opportunities for effective policy and program interventions to assist caregivers will be identified and communicated to relevant target audiences. Four Equity Reference Groups—African-Nova Scotian women, Mi'kmaq women, immigrant women and women with disabilities—are partners in this program, in the definition of research questions, the research process itself, and the interpretation and dissemination of research outcomes to both policy and community audiences.

In addition, we will work with health researchers to develop an assessment tool for adolescent health, using the results to publish a resource handbook for young women.

3.0 Core Business Areas

1. Policy & Research

Advises Minister on concerns and priorities of women, and formulates strategies and options to address these. Conducts quantitative and qualitative research in consultation with academic and community groups and government departments to ensure advice is a feasible, relevant, timely and accurate guide to governmental action.

2. Information & Education

Collects and disseminates information on women's issues to Minister, Council, staff, and other key stakeholders including media and the general public. Through a comprehensive communications strategy, informs and influences key stakeholders about issues and concerns affecting women, and about Council and government priorities, activities, accomplishments and opportunities for improvement in addressing women's issues.

3. Community Liaison & Rural Outreach

Through the Council members and the Community Liaison and Rural Outreach Program, brings

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forward concerns of women from across Nova Scotia, with particular attention to disadvantaged groups. Partners with communities and agencies to advance equality for women in programs and services.

4.0 Priorities 2004/2005

1. Policy and Research

- Provide research and policy advice to both provincial and federal governments on issues affecting women in Nova Scotia. Hold forums, prepare discussion papers and submit briefs to inform and advise policy audiences on matters such as: best practices for women's transition to employment; women's recruitment and retention into trades; diversity, gender equity and social inclusion; young women's health issues; victims' rights; and child-care.
- Inform and influence public policy through statistical analysis and research in areas such as women's political representation; aboriginal women; and rural and urban women.
- Ensure that opportunities to advance the status of women are identified and reflected in government policies and programs through participation in groups such as Skills Nova Scotia, the Sustainable Communities Initiative, the Community Development Advisory Group and the Interdepartmental Committee on United Nations Conventions.
- Disseminate results of the Healthy Balance Research Program on paid and unpaid work and caregiving to academic and policy audiences, caregiver and community groups and the general public provincially and nationally. In the FPT Forum of Status of Women Ministers, this agency shares the lead with PEI in developing a background paper on taxation and dependent care for Ministers' consideration, with funding under the Healthy Balance Research Program.

2. Information and Education

- Ensure public awareness of Council accomplishments and positions through appropriate communications plans and actions. Continue to mark International Women's Day, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, and Women's History Month.
- Increase awareness among young women of the career, family and health issues that affect them through development and dissemination of a young women's resource handbook, co-ordinated with the Council's overall communications plan.

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- Orientation and media relations training of new Council members; and strengthened internal communications with all Council members, giving them opportunities to connect more closely with work of staff and with the community at large through a pilot project using Council members as a women's speakers' bureau.
- Informational and communications support as required for:
 - Minister and Council Chair
 - Policy and Research Initiatives outlined above
 - Community Liaison and Rural Outreach Initiatives outlined below
 - Individual women and agencies that serve them
 - Educators, students, government officials and the general public, through the services of the Resource Centre

3. *Community Liaison & Rural Outreach*

- Increase women's leadership and participation in public affairs through dissemination of a handbook for women candidates and the development of a women's campaign school.
- In partnership with the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the NS Native Women's Association, coordinate and host a General Assembly of First Nations Women as input to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial/Aboriginal forum through the F/P/T Status of Women Ministers' forum.
- With the Disabled Persons Commission, update the findings of the Task Force on the Economic Integration of Women With Disabilities (1993).
- Inclusion of women in social and economic development will be ensured through continued participation in the Sustainable Communities Initiative, Rural Women & Pensions Project, Women's CED Network, and Techsploration. Work on sustainable community initiatives in two SCI field team areas (Bras d'Or Lakes and Annapolis-Fundy) will continue to integrate the concerns of women.

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5.0 Budget Context

Estimated Budget Expenditures		
	Forecast 2003/04 (Per 2003/04 Estimates Book)	Budget 2004/05 (Per 2004/05 Estimates Book)
	\$Thousands	\$Thousands
Total Program Expenses - Gross Current	\$741.0	\$756.0
Net Program Expenses - Net of Recoveries	\$741.0	\$756.0
Salaries and Benefits	\$488.8	\$495.3
Funded Staff (FTEs)	7.8	7.8

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6.0 Finance, Human Resources, Information Technology and Communications

Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology functions are carried out on behalf of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women by the Department of Justice CSU. This enables the Advisory Council to function with minimal expenditure for administrative overhead.

In the coming year, the decentralization of payroll and leave administration will result in faster turnaround for items such as Council honoraria and staff records of leave entitlements.

A communications advisor will continue to be assigned to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, enabling more effective communications support to the Minister and more systematic communications planning and implementation for all Council initiatives.

7.0 Outcomes: NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women				
Core Business Area: Policy and Research				
OUTCOME	MEASURE	DATA	TARGET 2004-05	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Ministerial satisfaction with work of Council	verbal check	Year 01-02: high Year 02-03: high	high	Continue advising Minister on concerns and priorities of women in Nova Scotia by maintaining high-quality policy-based research program as well as quality informational and communications support.
Public support for and satisfaction with Council's research/policy work	Tracking of research/policy publications requested by public, NGOs etc., as well as those downloaded from website	Years 01-02 and 02-03: statistical publications: average around 1,200-1,500 copies per year each, and briefs/policy documents average around 500-850 copies per year each with considerable variation depending on recency of publication and topic.	to be determined	The popularity of and consistent demand for our publications is an indicator of their value. Maintain high-quality policy-based research program as well as quality informational and communications support. Ensure public's awareness of Council publications, accomplishments and positions through effective communications planning and actions.

Outcomes: NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women				
Core Business Area: Information and Education				
OUTCOME	MEASURE	DATA	TARGET 2004-05	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Public awareness of Council initiatives	Tracking of Council website visits	Year 01-02: 49,244 Year 02-03: 68,260	50,000 + website visits	Maintain and enhance Council web-site, responding to identified information needs.
	Tracking of requests for service, information and/or referral made to head office staff	Year 01-02: 775 Year 02-03: 768	800-1,000 requests for service	Maintain Council's 1-800 line and publicize its availability in Council publications.
	Tracking of print media stories related to Council's work (excluding Community Liaison and Rural Outreach program)	Year 01-02: 37 Year 02-03: 29	Minimum of one print story per month	Ensure public's awareness of Council events, accomplishments and positions through effective communications planning and actions.

Outcomes: NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women				
Core Business Area: Information and Education				
OUTCOME	MEASURE	DATA	TARGET 2004-05	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Public support for and satisfaction with Council's information and education work	Tracking of information and education publications requested by public, NGOs, etc., as well as those downloaded from website	Year 01-02: 13,300 copies of <i>Making Changes</i> Year 02-03: 11,430 copies of <i>Making Changes</i>	to be determined	The popularity of and consistent demand for our publications is an indicator of their value. Ensure public's awareness of Council publications, accomplishments and positions through effective communications planning and actions.
Sustained effectiveness of Advisory Council	Council member satisfaction with orientation (low to high)	Year 01-02: high Year 02-03: n/a	high	Maintain Council orientation and media training using previous experience and expert media advice.
	Council member quarterly self-ratings of participation in community (1 to 10)	Year 01-02: 8.2 Year 02-03: 7.9	Average of 7 or higher out of 10	Conduct 2-day orientation for new Council members, including media training. Initiate pilot project with Council members' speakers' bureau in order to allow Council members to connect more closely with the work of staff and the community at large.

Outcomes: NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women				
Core Business Area: Community Liaison and Rural Outreach				
OUTCOME	MEASURE	DATA	TARGET 2004-05	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Public awareness of and satisfaction with Council initiatives	Tracking of requests for service, information and/or referral made to Community Liaison and Rural Outreach program staff	Year 01-02: 822 Year 02-03: 656* * N.B., Closure of regional office in Colchester County accounts for decline in requests for service made between 01-02 and 02-03.	700-750 requests for service	Maintain Council's 1-800 line and publicize its availability in Council publications. Ensure contact information for regional offices is well publicized, eg., via Council's website and through other public information channels.
	Tracking of print media stories related to work of Community Liaison and Rural Outreach Program.	Year 01-02: 8 Year 02-03: 17	Minimum of 6 print stories per year	Ensure public's awareness of Community Liaison and Rural Outreach Program events, accomplishments and positions through effective communications planning and actions.

